



# SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

---

THE REV. CANON EMILY GRIFFIN, CANON VICAR  
THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT, MARCH 30, 2025  
JOSHUA 5:9-12; PSALM 32; 2 CORINTHIANS 5:16-21; LUKE 15:1-3, 11b-32

## IT'S NOT OVER

This should be easy. Not even the news can kill the joy in today's Gospel. It might be the most beloved story in all of Scripture. Who isn't moved by the thought that a dead relationship can find new life, or that someone who is lost to us can be found? Reconciliation is usually a cause for joy and celebration. It's the most precious gift we might ever receive in this life, and yet all week this parable has been a box that I could not get fully inside.

The lid was stuck. Perhaps it's the open-endedness of this episode that frightens me. Once the lid is off, we might not be able to fit it back on and set limits to this story's reach. It's one thing to read a story

and reflect on it; it's quite another to be asked to write the next chapter. But if St. Paul is right in our reading from 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians that the ministry of reconciliation has been given to us, then writing the next lines is precisely our task.

We have a great first chapter here, to be sure. A father goes out to meet both of his lost sons – one who knows he was lost and another who doesn't realize it yet. He invites them both to a party and makes sure there are places for both when they're ready. In the process, he opens a path to reconciliation between the brothers as well, but it's up to them to

take the next step. We don't hear what happens next; in a sense, that's up to us.

It's typical in considering this parable to cast ourselves in our preferred role. Many of us would rather be the lusty and careless brother vs. the awkward and resentful one, even if the role (as in my case) is horribly miscast. We're perfectly happy, though, to cast God as the father; that way, we can be the recipients and not the givers of grace. It's one thing for God to take the lead in reconciliation after estrangement. That doesn't cost us anything. God has compassion and mercy to spare. God can afford joy. It's when we're asked to hand-deliver the party invitations that it gets tricky - when we're called to be the hands and voice of God's welcome not just to the outcast but to the greedy and the spiteful in our families, in our country - when we have no control over the seating chart and must look those who have hurt us in the eye that the party stops feeling fun and gets uncomfortably real.

Why is reconciliation so hard? If the One who knows everything about us doesn't make us crawl but comes running toward us, why can't we respond in kind to each

other? Sometimes, we misunderstand what reconciliation means. It is not condoning the wrongs that have been done. It is not erasing the past or rewinding the clock or backing down on protecting the vulnerable. Some abuses, even when forgiven, create a distance that can't be fully overcome in our lifetime. We can't always go home again. In some cases, it may not be safe or even possible.

Besides, not everyone who needs forgiveness turns around to receive it. Some never seem to reach that point, no matter how many pigsties they visit. They may never admit what they've done or the distance between their intentions and their actions. The forgiveness, the release, that leads to reconciliation may feel dishonest at times, that we're somehow sugarcoating the story at the expense of the truth. Withholding forgiveness can help us hold onto injustices that are otherwise unspoken. It can give us a sense of power when we feel like power has been taken from us. It's something we can hold onto when so many other things have been taken away.

I wonder what we could hold onto instead, what might give us more lasting

power. I'm not sure that we want to build our futures on a record of the wrongs done to us, on some never-ending score sheet (no matter how accurate or thorough it may be.) That is not a firm foundation.

Frankly, it's a joyless waste of time. What if, instead of holding each other to a past we cannot change, we hold onto God's compassion and mercy and let that anchor us instead?

Easier said than done. Make no mistake, this choice does cost us something. Before we can let go of resentment and move toward reconciliation, we need to speak what has been unspoken, to name the complicated truths that stand in our way. And once we make this our path, we can no longer take solace in denial or complaint or the certainty that we're always right. We relinquish our role as the sole storyteller of our lives and may hear new versions of the same events

from different, less flattering angles. In other words, reconciliation is a long story with multiple episodes and multiple writers. It outgrows whatever boxes we might put it in, and it won't stay contained for long.

The good news is that no matter how close we think we are to the end, the final chapters haven't been written yet. We don't know – we can't know - what the end will look like, because the plot is not entirely up to us. Why? Because we are loved and held and nudged forward by a compassionate, merciful God who insists on bringing new life out of dead relationships, who never stops seeking and saving the lost, and who will not give up on offering us joy – whether we're ready for it or not. In the Name of the One who blows the lids off our boxes and leads us all through death to new life. Amen.

*Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32 [All the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to Jesus. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." So Jesus told them this parable: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place*

*throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."' So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe--the best one--and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate. "Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'"]*



SAINT MARK'S  
EPISCOPAL CATHEDRAL